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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls

High-level interactive dialogue among ministers on building alliances to achieve gender equality and empower rural women and girls

Chair's summary

1. On 13 March 2018, the Commission on the Status of Women held a high-level ministerial dialogue on building alliances to achieve gender equality and empower rural women and girls under the priority theme "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls". The participants in the high-level interactive dialogue exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the topic.

2. The Minister for Equality, Integration and Immigration of Ireland, David Stanton, chaired and moderated the high-level dialogue. The meeting opened with an introduction by the Chair. Ministers and high-level officials from 34 Member States and one observer exchanged good practices, modalities, ongoing and planned initiatives and efforts to build alliances and partnerships to promote gender equality. Nine representatives from non-governmental organizations contributed their perspectives. The dialogue concluded with closing comments by the Chair.

Challenges and opportunities for rural women and girls

3. Participants recognized rural women and girls as agents of change and pillars of rural communities, and highlighted the significant contributions of rural women to

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economic growth, rural development, sustainable agriculture, food security and environmental protection and sustainability.

4. Many participants drew attention to persistent challenges faced by women and girls in rural and remote areas, and the multiple forms of discrimination, as well as the violence and harmful practices, that they experienced. Their limited, or lack of, access to basic services, education, health care, land and productive assets, infrastructure, water and sanitation, financing, technology and other resources further exacerbated the marginalization and exclusion they faced. Rural women and girls also carried an unequal share of unpaid care and domestic work in their households. The work of rural women was predominantly in the informal sector and they had fewer opportunities than men to obtain decent work. The added challenges of armed conflict and humanitarian crises for rural women and girls and for rural development were also mentioned.

5. Participants highlighted initiatives and efforts undertaken to address those challenges, including legal and policy reforms, plans and programmes to promote the empowerment of rural women and girls and to tackle discrimination and violence, and gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting. Access to justice and legal services for rural women and girls was another key area of intervention.

6. The importance of quality education and training opportunities for rural women and girls, including with regard to digital and financial literacy, was highlighted. Some speakers emphasized the role of technology for delivering training and services in rural areas and for fostering inclusion. New technologies and information and communications technologies allowed for flexible working hours and access to jobs and market opportunities for women in rural and remote areas.

7. The importance of promoting the empowerment of rural women, including through measures to enhance labour market participation, was stressed. Entrepreneurship opportunities for rural women were being enhanced, and support was being provided for networks of entrepreneurs and women's cooperatives. Access to markets and financing, credit, loans, insurance and banking were key elements in the empowerment of rural women. The need to recognize and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work and to strengthen the role of rural women in decision-making within households was emphasized, as was the need to improve the health of rural women, including sexual and reproductive health, and family planning.

8. Participation and leadership by rural women, and by their organizations, in the development, implementation and monitoring of national legislation, policies and development plans and programmes were seen as crucial for sustainable development. Participants gave examples of the enhanced participation of rural women in decision-making processes at all levels, which sometimes had been achieved through quotas. Their participation in local representative bodies, such as local councils or municipalities, as well as in peace processes, was considered to be especially important.

Building alliances to achieve gender equality and empower rural women and girls

9. Many participants welcomed the role of alliances and partnerships between government and other stakeholders to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. Such alliances frequently included multiple stakeholders, such as national and local governments, civil society, trade unions, women's organizations and cooperatives, academia and the private sector. National mechanisms for gender equality played a crucial role in such efforts.

Collaboration between governments and civil society had resulted in important legal reforms and effective national policies and strategies.

10. Alliance building and broad-based collaboration had been effective in bringing about action in areas such as gender-based violence, food security, the economic empowerment of women, education, capacity-building and access to finance, land rights and tenure security, natural resources management and infrastructure development. Joint efforts had been deployed to address gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms and practices. The important role of men and boys in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in rural areas was also stressed.

11. Speakers emphasized the importance of enhanced coordination and coherence within government and across sectors for the benefit of rural women and girls, involving different ministries and offices of the public sector, such as those responsible for agriculture, finance, labour, education and health. Gender focal points and specialized units across government enabled and facilitated gender mainstreaming in sectoral policies and strategies.

12. Partnerships with universities, academia and research centres had contributed to expanded knowledge about the situation of women and girls in rural areas. Sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics enabled better policy and programme development, and supported accountability with regard to public efforts and actions. Some speakers gave examples of ongoing work among stakeholders to develop better indicators to capture the lives of rural women, while others called for increased efforts to measure progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals for rural women and girls.

13. Participants stressed the need to support and strengthen organizations for rural women with regard to efforts towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. The need to create safe and inclusive spaces for the voices and participation of rural women was mentioned, as was the need to support organizing and movement building among women for realizing rights. A need to invest in the leadership and voice of girls was identified. Concern was expressed about the shrinking space for civil society.

14. Alliances among stakeholders had contributed to enhanced implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women for rural women and girls. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals provided a critical impetus for building alliances and partnerships to help realize the rights of rural women and girls. Regional efforts also played an important role in supporting rural women and girls, as did international and regional organizations. Development cooperation contributed to enhancing the situation of rural women and girls.